

EXHIBIT 9



POLITICS

'This Is Crossing The Line': Saudis Co-Opted Veterans' Voices To Lobby Congress

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SCOTT SIMON



5-Minute Listen



When U.S. Navy veteran Gary Ard traveled last year to lobby against a bill before Congress, he didn't realize Saudi Arabia was paying for all of it — including rooms at the Trump International Hotel.

 Transcript

SCOTT SIMON, HOST:

Now to a story about Saudi influence campaign using American veterans. The Washington Post revealed new details in a report this month. Veterans were given all-expense paid trips to Washington, D.C., to lobby Congress over a 2016 law, the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, or JASTA. It allows the families of 9/11 victims to sue the Saudi government for any role Saudi citizens had in those attacks. Saudi Arabia strongly opposed the law. Many veterans worried the new law might lead other countries to retaliate and prosecute U.S. troops serving overseas. Gary Ard of Texas, a 46-year-old veteran who was a Navy Medical Corpsman, went on two of those lobbying trips in December 2016 and again January 2017.

GARY ARD: If it helps to discuss these matters with congressmen and senators because you're a veteran. You know, the idea was that it would resonate a little more from someone who can actually be in the position to suffer the consequences.

SIMON: Where did you stay in Washington, D.C.?

ARD: Well, much to my surprise, we wound up staying at the Trump International Hotel.

SIMON: Nice place?

ARD: Very nice. Extremely nice.

SIMON: Mr. Ard says by his second trip, he realized his visits were being funded by the Saudi government and that the event organizers, vets themselves, failed to make that connection clear to him and other participants. The Washington Post found that within a month of Trump's election, 500 nights at the Trump Hotel had been paid by a lobbying firm representing the Saudi government.

So Mr. Ard, did you feel used?

ARD: Yeah. I was very disappointed because, you know, all our efforts were genuine. And there was a few people that knew where this was coming from, didn't disclose it. And, you know, shame on them. So my problem with this is that now when veterans go to visit senators and congressmen, are they kind of be received in the same distinguished light, or are they going to be looked at as somebody who is being paid or...

SIMON: Yeah.

ARD: ...Like, being taken advantage of by some foreign national interest lobbying group?

SIMON: I'm sure you know the old phrase, Mr. Ard, politics makes strange bedfellows. And even if you're uncomfortable, is it not just a fact of life that sometimes people who have divergent interests in many respects do agree on one or two issues and, you know, that makes democracy possible?

ARD: I agree.

SIMON: So the fact that you feel strongly about this legislation and Saudi Arabia does for different reasons, does it really matter?

ARD: Well, it does. And I'll tell you why. During the second visit, things started to get a little bit more directed. You know, like, for instance, one of the people involved in the group that was leading the group said, OK, one of our directives today is to talk to these congressmen about whether or not they know some family members of 9/11 victims. And perhaps maybe we can create a meeting.

And I just - I had to stop everybody. And I said, we cannot walk into a congressman's office and ask them to set up a meeting between family members of 9/11 victims and us. You know, as as military service members, we went to other countries and fought off the people - or that were associated with the people that created this tragic event of

9/11. And now you're going to try to mediate for, potentially, a country that might have been responsible for this? So fortunately, no one, after I stated that case, said anything like that.

SIMON: I have to ask, Mr. Ard, do you feel that President Trump has been soft on Saudi Arabia?

ARD: In my opinion, he needs to listen to Congress, and he needs to listen to the Senate more than he does. And they need to respect the presidency, as well.

SIMON: Navy veteran Gary Ard, thanks so much for speaking with us.

ARD: You're quite welcome.

SIMON: We asked the Saudi Embassy for comment and have not received a response. We did hear from one organizer of those veteran fly-ins, who says that he informed all veterans who participated at their arrival, their travel and lodging was funded by the Saudi government. The Saudi-funded bookings at the Trump Hotel are now at issue in a pair of federal lawsuits, alleging President Trump violated the Constitution by taking improper payments from a foreign government.

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